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DE RUEHIN #2130/01 2601015
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
O 171015Z SEP 07
FM AIT TAIPEI
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 6829
INFO RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING 7267
RUEHUL/AMEMBASSY SEOUL 8900
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 9075
RUEHCN/AMCONSUL CHENGDU 2094
RUEHGZ/AMCONSUL GUANGZHOU 0541
RUEHHK/AMCONSUL HONG KONG 8523
RUEHGH/AMCONSUL SHANGHAI 1355
RUEHSH/AMCONSUL SHENYANG 6063
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHINGTON DC
RHHJJAA/JICPAC HONOLULU HI
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHINGTON DC
RHHMUNA/USPACOM HONOLULU HI

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 TAIPEI 002130

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 6/15/2032

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [TW](#)

SUBJECT: DUELING UN RALLIES: MOSTLY SMOKE, LITTLE FIRE

REF: TAIPEI 02123

Classified By: AIT Director Stephen M. Young, Reason 1.4 (b/d)

¶1. (SBU) Summary: The DPP and KMT on September 15 hosted competing rallies in Kaohsiung and Taichung, respectively, that aimed to promote Taiwan's entry into the UN and their party's separate UN referenda. Led by all the DPP's top leaders, the party faithful turned out in moderate numbers to support the DPP's proposed UN referendum and bid to join the organization under the name "Taiwan." President Chen urged voters to support the referendum and the Hsieh-Su presidential ticket next March, but said nothing about U.S. opposition to the referendum. Nor did he break any new ground on cross-Straits or sovereignty issues. In their competing rally, KMT leaders criticized the DPP administration for poor economic performance and emphasized the need to raise people's living standards. Ma called the DPP's UN referendum an "election gimmick" intended to stir up emotions ahead of the presidential race. AIT observed little anti-U.S. rhetoric at either event. End Summary.

DPP Leading the UN Charge in Kaohsiung...

¶2. (C) Led by Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) leaders, the party faithful turned out in moderate numbers on September 15 for the "Protect Taiwan, Enter UN" march and rally in Kaohsiung. The rally aimed to stir up support for the DPP's planned UN referendum bid to join the organization under the name "Taiwan." Despite claims by organizers that more than 500,000 people participated, more realistic police estimates ranged from 50,000 to 150,000. Kaohsiung police at the rally told AIT/K the number was around 50,000, explaining that the site could not physically accommodate more people. The DPP, which mobilized supporters from all over the island, especially the south, budgeted NTD28 million (USD850,000) for the event to cover costs of tour buses and meals for the participants. In addition to the DPP, the Taiwan Solidarity Union (TSU) also participated in the event, despite former President Lee Teng-hui's recent criticism of the DPP and KMT UN referenda.

¶3. (SBU) The DPP parade started at 4:30 in the afternoon and marched to the night rally site, near the Kaohsiung Art Museum. President Chen Shui-bian led most of the cabinet, as

well as presidential candidate Frank Hsieh (Chang-ting), vice presidential candidate Su Tseng-chang, and other DPP heavyweights in a 4 km march through downtown Kaohsiung. The marchers entered the final rally grounds at around 6:00 p.m. They passed through a large green and orange "UN arch," symbolizing Taiwan's UN bid, while Beethoven's "Ode to Joy" (All Men are Brothers), Chen's perennial campaign song, blared in the background. Although the DPP rejected a proposal to encourage protesters to wear "Bush shoes" (a local nickname for "Croc"-type sandals) as a protest against the U.S., vendors hawking the sandals seemed to do a brisk business.

¶4. (SBU) President Chen and candidate Hsieh delivered impassioned speeches at the evening rally. Chen urged the people to support the DPP's UN referendum and the Hsieh-Su presidential ticket next March. Chen also criticized the KMT for the highly restrictive referendum law passed in 2005, which he claimed has set a high bar for any referendum to pass. Presidential candidate Frank Hsieh attacked KMT presidential candidate Ma Ying-jeou for not "standing with Taiwan" and challenged Ma "to give Taiwan a chance" if he really loves Taiwan. None of the rally speakers mentioned U.S. opposition to Taiwan's UN bid and the DPP's UN referendum. On his way down to Kaohsiung, however, President Chen told reporters that U.S.-Taiwan relations were at low ebb and claimed without elaboration that high-level talks with Washington had been suspended.

...Linking Up with New York Event

¶5. (SBU) The Kaohsiung rally prominently featured a DVC

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link to a rally held simultaneously in New York. Participants at both locations chanted "protect Taiwan, elect our own people, UN for Taiwan" at the climax of the rally. The New York event was led by Taiwan Government Information Office Spokesman Shieh Jyr-wei, who flew out especially for the occasion, and entertained the crowd with a rap performance. Media report over 3,000 people attended the New York activity.

KMT Trying to Keep Up

¶6. (C) The opposition KMT, for its part, organized a march and rally in Taichung City intended to compete with the DPP Kaohsiung event. Dubbed "Fight for people's livelihood, return to the UN," the Taichung activities largely focused on attacking the DPP administration for corruption, poor economic performance, and failing to improve living standards. Police estimate turnout was around 50,000. Although most of the KMT senior leadership attended either the march or the rally, notably absent were former KMT Chairman Lien Chan and PFP Chairman James Soong, who have been critical of the KMT referendum drive. Some media claimed enthusiasm and participation by KMT legislators from northern Taiwan was muted. Local branches chartered 1,000 tour buses to take people to the rally and built 10 floats to highlight civic, social, and economic problems that the DPP administration has failed to address.

¶7. (SBU) KMT presidential candidate Ma Ying-jeou, wearing a farmer's hat, polo shirt, rolled up blue jeans and blue-and-white flip-flops to symbolize his "Taiwanese-ness," emphasized economic themes rather than the UN issue during his speech. Ma said the KMT rally aimed to fight for improving people's daily lives and economic conditions. "If we can't improve the people's lives first, the issue of the UN referendum is superfluous," Ma said. Ma criticized the DPP referendum as an "election gimmick" intended to stir up emotions ahead of the presidential race next March.

Pro-Unification Groups on Their Own

¶8. (SBU) Striking a dissonant chord, several pro-unification groups in Taipei held a rally on the same day to voice their opposition to the DPP and KMT UN proposals. Participants criticized the DPP referendum as pursuing Taiwan independence. Some urged maintenance of the "status quo"--Taiwan and the mainland belong to one China--as the only way to guarantee peace. Others said that as long as they enjoy a good job and life, there is no need to be a member of the UN. Taipei police estimate that approximately 12,000 people attended the Taipei event.

Comment

¶9. (C) Despite a moderate turnout for the DPP and KMT rallies, the well-orchestrated crowds did not seem particularly enthusiastic. While rally leaders and speakers were impassioned, most participants appeared to be at the events only because they had been mobilized by their respective party apparatuses. The events in Kaohsiung and Taichung will have little if any impact on Taiwan's bid to enter the UN, and probably only limited effect in drumming up further support for the UN referendum proposals, but the activities marked the first major political rallies of the 2008 presidential campaign.
YOUNG